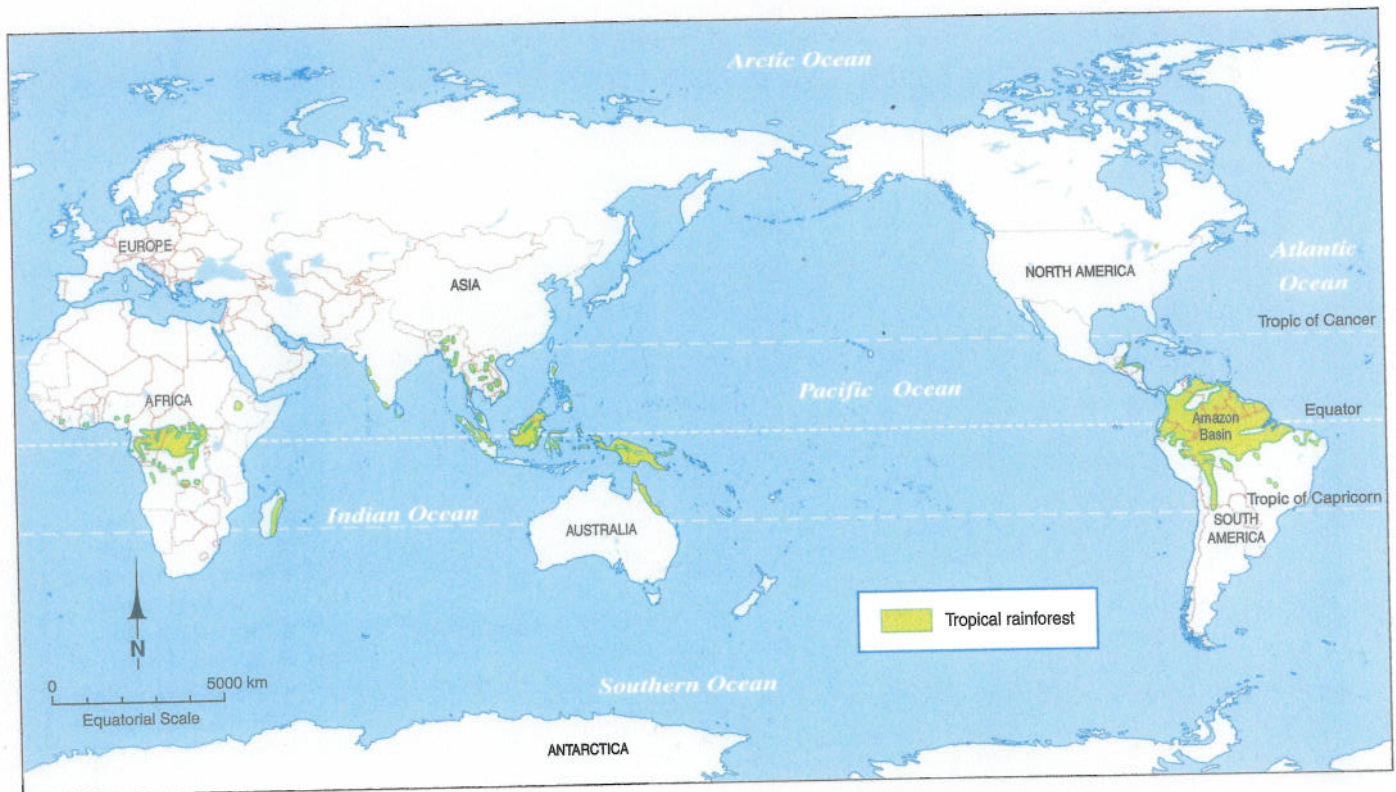


## Organising Geographic Data: Describing patterns



ABOVE  
Figure 1.26  
The distribution of  
tropical rainforests

### Describing Patterns

Geographers not only study natural and human environments to identify their characteristics, they also use their skills to identify why things occur as they do. To obtain understanding of environments, geographers seek to identify any patterns that may be helpful in explaining the challenging questions posed.

Patterns are best identified through the use of geographic media, such as maps, graphs, tables and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). By representing the data in a form other than words, you begin to process the data by classifying it into a variety of categories, and representing it in a visual manner. For example, a table of data on the annual population growth rate of nations represented as a map assists you to identify patterns, describe and compare various aspects and identify any contrasts. Conclusions can be made in either your written or oral description of the geographic data.

### Finding the Pattern and Describing the Pattern

Many geographers use the technique of PQE and strengthen their analysis with supporting evidence:

- P – general pattern
- Q – quantification
- E – exceptions

It is important that you learn how to make an appropriate description of a *distribution* pattern. There are three steps in describing a *distribution*, using the PQE technique:

### The General Pattern (P)

When you first look at a piece of geographic media, there is generally something that you notice about the overall data. On a map it may be the predominant shade tone; on a graph it is likely to be the shape of a line or the height of a particular bar. In a table it may be significantly higher numbers in a category and, in the use of GIS, the commonality of *locations* between data sets. It is this general pattern that you are describing initially. For example, figure 1.26 shows that tropical rainforests are widely *distributed* between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Tropic of Cancer.

### Quantification (Q)

Quantification is the adding of statistics to give specific detail to the pattern and to define the pattern more closely. To assist in quantification it is common to name *regions* and provide examples of the pattern using quantification. For example, from figure 1.26, 'The earth's largest continuous *region* of tropical rainforest is *located* in north and central South America. In this *region* the Amazon Basin rainforest covers an area of approximately 4.1 million square kilometres.'

### Exceptions (E)

There are often instances where something does not fit the overall pattern, and these are known as the exceptions. These exceptions need to be identified and quantified in the one instance. For example, from figure 1.26, 'There are small patches of remnant rainforest to the north of the Tropic of Cancer in southern Asia'. This area of tropical rainforest is not included in the description of the pattern as initially described.